

**Pioneer Trail Research  
MONOGRAPH**

# **Lolo Motorway Construction History The Western End**

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## **PREFACE**

This report documents my research on the location and building of the western end of the Lolo Motorway of 1934. I have travelled each portion of this route several times over the years and have come to appreciate how well the Northern Nez Perce Tribe had located a route over the mountains to the Bitter Root Valley. It became the route of the Bird-Truax trail in 1866 and the Motorway in 1934.

This report will always be a snapshot in time, waiting to be revised with newer information.

I invite readers to contact me at Iowa State University to make comments and suggest revisions, additions, or corrections.

Steve F. Russell  
Ames, Iowa  
November 9, 1993  
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## INTRODUCTION

**1805-06** In the early 1800s, President Jefferson and the U.S. government had a vision of a transportation route from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean. The newly acquired Louisiana Purchase had added an immense track of land to the country and explorations and mapping were needed. Jefferson chose Lewis and Clark to lead an expedition of discovery westward to find the most practicable water route to the west coast.

Lewis and Clark were tasked with finding the best portage between the Mississippi River and Columbia River basins. Their explorations led them to the Northern Nez Perces Trail between the Bitter Root River in Montana and the Clearwater River in Idaho. The sought-after "easy" portage was actually a traveler's nightmare. A jumble of mountains blocked the way between the two rivers. However, the Northern Nez Perces Trail was the ancient route used by the northwest tribes and represented the best route when considering Jefferson's instructions to find the best water route.

The Northern Nez Perces Trail between Weippe, Idaho and Lolo, Montana was used by the Nez Perce Tribe as their route to Buffalo hunting country in Montana. The Lewis and Clark guides knew that this was the desired trail so their expedition used it going westward in 1805 and eastward in 1806. Their journal entries and maps document the location of the route and the difficulty in travelling it.

**1855** In the mid-1800s, the Northern Nez Perces Trail was being used by fur trappers, miners, and merchants as a transportation route between Idaho and Montana. It acquired the name Lolo Trail during this time.

**1866** In 1866, the federal government decided to survey and construct a wagon road between Virginia City, Montana and Lewiston, Idaho [1,2]. The road was to be built along the route of the Lolo Trail. In the summer of 1866, a civil engineer named George Nicholson and his Nez Perce guide, Tah-tu-tash, travelled the trail and did a crude survey of its location. Nicholson used this ancient trail as the guide for the wagon road route. Also in 1866, a work crew of 60 men cleared the surveyed route between Weippe and Lolo Pass and constructed a pack trail. This new pack trail became the Lolo Trail route and several sections of the Northern Nez Perces Trail were abandoned. No wagon road was built because of the construction difficulty, short work season, and lack of sufficient funds.

**1877** In the war of 1877 between the non-treaty Nez Perce bands (now called the Chief Joseph Band) and the federal government, the Lolo Trail was used as the retreat route by the Nez Perce.

**1900** An historian, Olin D. Wheeler, travelled the approximate route of the Lolo Trail to document its location for the Lewis and Clark Centennial celebration.

**1907** The U.S. Forest Service started using the Lolo Trail for management and fire control purposes. They used the 1866 Lolo Trail as an "arterial" route to supply their fire lookout system.

**1934** The Lolo Motorway (Lolo Divide Road) is the original one-lane road that first connected Montana and Idaho along the ancient travel route of the northwest tribes. The road was constructed to primitive standards to meet the need to give vehicular access to national forest land north of the Lochsa River. This link, completed in the late fall of 1934, finally fulfilled President Jefferson's dream of finding an easy portage between the Missouri and Columbia Rivers.

Figure 1. Shows the major routes of the Lolo Trail System as described above.

## CONSTRUCTION CHRONOLOGY

**1897** In about 1897, there was a wagon road constructed from Musselshell Meadows to the Pioneer Mine on Dutchman Creek [3]. The route of this road was up the ridge to the north between Gold Creek and Lolo Creek about 4.5 miles from Musselshell Work Center and then eastward, across Siberia Creek and over the ridge, to the mine site, an additional distance of about one mile. The total road length north of Musselshell was about 5.5 miles. A short segment of this route eastward out of Musselshell Meadows is shown on Sheet 6 of the *November 1907 Bitterroot National Forest Map* [4]. The entire route is shown, with moderate accuracy, on Sheet 9 of the *February 1915 Clearwater National Forest Map* [5]. On a modern Forest Visitor Map, this route is Road 5155 to its junction with Road 5021 and then eastward to the old mine site.

SUMMARY: The Pioneer Mine Road of 1897, now Road 5155, formed the first crude version of the Lolo Motorway for the first 4.5 miles eastward out of Musselshell Meadows.

**1915** Sometime between 1915 and 1930, the Superior Stock Driveway was pioneered from Musselshell Meadows to the trailhead at Superior, Montana. Much of the route already had existing trail as evidenced by archive maps for 1913 [6] and 1915 [5]. Part of the stock driveway became part of the route of the Lolo Motorway north from the Pioneer Mine area. The route of the stock driveway is shown on the *1930 Clearwater National Forest Map* [7] and is essentially Road 535 north of its junction with Road 5155 all the way to Beaver Saddle.

**1929** The construction plans for the western end of the Lolo Motorway were described in a report by R. P. Hilleary in November of 1929 [8]. The plan was to build a low-standard road from Musselshell Ranger Station to Indian Grave Peak. It was called "*The Musselshell-Indian Grave Project*." The overall plan was to follow the general location of the Lolo Trail. An alternate route using Austin Ridge was suggested by Mr. Kelley in a memorandum on October 21, 1929. The route was examined but was not selected. The first 7.0 miles of the selected route going eastward from Musselshell was being used as a sheep driveway in 1929. All that was needed was clearing of stumps.

Hilleary never actually made a reconnaissance of the entire route because of heavy snow. The following is an account of the reconnaissance attempts from his report:

*R. P. Hilleary together with W. E. Buckingham and J. E. Kaufman, rangers, left the Bungalow Ranger Station on October 24 to make this reconnaissance in connection with certain other data to be secured on proposed bridge sites at the forks of Kelly Creek and North Fork Clearwater and at the Cedars Ranger Station. This procedure brought the party to the Selway-Clearwater Divide by way of Kelly Creek Ranger Station and the trail over Windy Ridge. Here snow was encountered to a depth of one foot on the level and badly drifted. It was deemed inadvisable to attempt further progress along this Divide under these conditions, principally because of lack of feed for the stock already breaking down under the long forced marches. Accordingly, the party returned to the Bungalow via the Weitas Ranger Station and thence to the Musselshell Ranger Station from which a reconnaissance was made with W. E. Buckingham and Robert Johanson, rangers, of the routes along Austin Ridge and the ridge between Gold and Siberia Creeks as far as Camp Martin. Heavy snow here again precluded further progress. The route from Musselshell to Indian Grave was covered in detailed reconnaissance only as to that portion from the Musselshell to Camp Martin. An attempt was made to cover that portion from Camp Martin to Indian Grave but this had to be abandoned. The data outlined in this report on that section of this route are derived from the 1/2-inch contour map of*

*the Clearwater National Forest and the familiarity of the personnel of the Clearwater with the ground covered by the proposed route. Mr. Buckingham laid out and had charge of most of the trail work on this Divide.*

Hilleary and others estimated the location and distances of the proposed road using a topographic map and the Lolo Trail. Their location and distance estimates have considerable errors. Their total estimated distance was 41.5 miles but the constructed Motorway distance over the same route is 49.5 miles. Figures 3 and 4 at the end of this report document the actual location of the Western Portion of the Lolo Motorway of 1934.

The project was divided into three sections as follows:

Section 1. 12.1 Miles Musselshell Ranger Station to Camp Martin.

{The initial plan for this route was different than the road actually constructed in the vicinity of Belle Creek Campground. Hilleary's map shows the planned route west of the constructed Motorway. The actual distance for this section is *13.6 miles*.}

Section 2. 16.9 Miles Camp Martin to Bench Mark 5770 near Chimney Butte.

{BM 5770 is on the Bird-Truax Trail 1.1 trail miles east of Sherman Saddle and southeast of Chimney Butte. The motorway was not routed this way but, instead, was routed north of Chimney Butte. The actual distance for this segment is *22.3 miles*.}

Section 3. 12.5 Miles Bench Mark 5770 near Chimney Butte to Indian Grave Peak.

{The actual distance for this segment is *13.6 miles*}

In Hilleary's report, Section 2 was subdivided with estimated distances as follows:

Section 2a. 5.1 Miles Camp Martin to the Pass just west of Rocky Ridge.

{The terminus of this segment is now BM 5914, 1.25 miles eastward from Pete Forks Junction. This is where the Bird-Truax Trail reached the main ridge. The actual distance for this segment is *7.3 miles*.}

Section 2b. 6.4 Miles Pass just west of Rocky Ridge to Ridge Crest just west of Deep Saddle.

{The terminus of this segment is now El 5645, 1.2 miles westward from Deep Saddle. The actual distance for this segment is *9.1 miles*.}

Section 2c. 5.4 Miles Ridge Crest just west of Deep Saddle to Bench Mark 5770 near Chimney Butte.

{The replacement terminus for this segment is BM 5238, 1.2 miles eastward from Sherman Saddle and northeast of Chimney Butte. The actual distance for this segment is *5.9 miles*.}

**SUMMARY:** The first seven miles of the Superior Stock Driveway, now Roads 5155 and 535, formed the next crude segment of the Lolo Motorway from LM mile<sup>1</sup> 4.5 to LM mile 7.55. The Motorway is Road 535 from LM mile 7.55 to the junction of Roads 535 and 104 at Beaver Saddle.

Figures 2 and 3 show the constructed Lolo Motorway for the western end. Some of Hilleary's notation for distances and proposed camp sites are also shown.

**August 1930** In August of 1930, construction on the Lolo Motorway began eastward out of Musselshell Meadows [9]. The work crew was improving the roadway on the route of the Superior Stock Driveway, i.e., removing stumps and grading.

**October 1930** By October 10, the crew had five and one-half miles of reconstructed road completed [10]. This distance (LM 5.5) would put the crew just beyond the point where Road 525 crosses Siberia Creek.

**Fall 1930** Weather conditions were apparently very favorable that fall because they managed to extend the construction to Camp Martin (or near it) before the end of the season. The Clearwater Tribune reported the next year that 12 miles of road had been constructed this year [11]. Using Hilleary's distances, 12 miles would put them at Camp Martin. Using actual Motorway distances, 12 miles would put them at the junction of Road 104 and Foot Rot Trail #100.

**SUMMARY:** The Lolo Motorway was probably constructed a total of 13.6 miles from Musselshell Meadows to Camp Martin. This route is now Roads 535, 5155, 535, and 104.

**1931** It is unclear how much work was done on the Lolo Motorway this year but it appears that the road was extended at least to Lean-To Ridge, the junction of Roads 104 and 555 (north of Snowy Summit). It was used to transport men and supplies to the Hemlock and Lean-To fires that year [11]. It is probable that the fire season of 1931 slowed construction. The road down Lean-To Ridge toward Weitas Guard Station was also a priority and there might have been considerable work on it since by July, 1932, the Cook Mountain Road was within 2½ mile of Weitas Creek [12].

**SUMMARY:** It is likely that a total of only 1.45 miles of new construction was added this year. This route is now Road 104 from Camp Martin to Lean-to Ridge Junction.

**1932** From July to October, the Motorway was constructed from Lean-to Ridge Junction for a distance of 9.7 miles to the junction of Roads 500 and 557 near Weitas Meadows. Guy Vandevender [13] reported working on the 'saw gang' that cut the right-of-way and said their first camp was at Camp Martin which could then be reached by truck. A bulldozer was reported to be working on the Motorway in the vicinity of Snowy Summit [14]. The four roads that were connected to the Motorway in 1932 are 1) Hemlock Butte to Beaver Saddle, 2) Snowy Summit Lookout Road, 3) Lean-to Ridge Junction to Weitas Creek, and 4) Musselshell-to-Mud-Creek Lookout.

**SUMMARY:** There were 9.7 miles of new construction eastward from Lean-to Ridge Junction to near Weitas Meadows. Many other roads were connected to the Motorway on the west end.

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<sup>1</sup>The mileage references denoted by LM are distances along the Original Lolo Motorway eastward from Musselshell Meadows.

**1933** In 1933, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) crews arrived to help in the construction of the Lolo Motorway. Aerial photos of 1933 show a huge camp of many structures at Weitas Meadows. The Clearwater Tribune reported that Camp F-2 was moving to Weitas Meadows at the end of July [15]. With help from the CCC Camp F-2 crew, the Motorway was extended eastward from near Weitas Meadows to beyond Green Saddle and maybe beyond Deep Saddle, an addition of at least 6.4 miles of roadway. Details of construction progress are sketchy. The Clearwater Tribune [16] reported in September that the road along the "*Lolo Divide*" had reached Deep Saddle. Aerial photos of 1933 show the road completed to about ½ mile east of Green Saddle. It is doubtful that the road was constructed to Sherman Saddle. The Clearwater Tribune reports that the last three camps of CCC crews were leaving the last of October and the first part of November [17, 18]. This fall, a fifth road was connected to the Motorway from Canyon Junction to Pete Forks Junction [19].

SUMMARY: There were at least 6.4 miles added to the Motorway to extend it from Weitas Meadows to Deep Saddle or beyond.

**1934** The Motorway was completed at least to No-See-Um Meadows by the end of this season, an additional 7.5 miles. A packer named Harvey Grasser reported that the road had been constructed to No-See-Um Meadows because he packed for the 1934 fire on the Lochsa [21]. H. D. (Buck) Weaver reported that fire fighters from the Lochsa came up the trail to Sherman Peak where there were trucks waiting to take them out [22]. The Clearwater Tribune reported that all but 12 miles of the Motorway was now built and that the Forest Service was expecting to have the road ready for travel by September 1 [23]. In October, Supervisor Myrick led a party of local residents viewing the road improvement work. They had an elk steak dinner at the road camp at No-See-Um Meadows [24]. Although it appears that the road was completed this fall, travel was not permitted due to mud [25]. The crews working on each end probably met somewhere between Bald Mountain and Indian Grave Camp. The original plan of the Clearwater Forest, as documented in Hilleary's report, was to construct the road to Indian Grave Peak, however, the record is unclear.

SUMMARY: The Motorway was completed eastward to at least No-See-Um Meadows, an addition of 7.5 miles, and maybe all the way to Indian Grave Peak. The road was probably completed by late fall but was not usable because of mud.

**1935** The new Lolo Motorway was travelled in July by Walter Sewell and Harry Powell on a trip from Orofino to Lolo Hot Springs [26]. It is unlikely that any road work was done in early spring because the heavy snow drifts don't leave the Motorway until late June and sometimes not until early July. A spur road was constructed from the Motorway to Castle Butte Lookout [27]. A modern route description from Musselshell Meadows to Powell is Roads 5155, 535, 104, 500, and 569 to U.S. Highway 12.

SUMMARY: The Lolo Motorway was open for public travel in July of 1935, 130 years after Lewis and Clark travelled the ancient trail looking for an easy portage, and 69 years after a failed attempt by the federal government to build a wagon road over the same route.

### Construction Summary.

1930 (13.6 Miles) Musselshell Meadows to Camp Martin. The route would be Roads 535, 5155, 535, and 104.

1931 (1.45 Miles) Camp Martin to Lean-to Ridge Junction (north of Snowy Summit). The route would be Road 104 eastward.

- |      |              |   |
|------|--------------|---|
| 1932 | (9.7 Miles)  | Lean-to Ridge Junction (north of Snowy Summit) to near Weitas Meadows. The route would be Road 104 eastward to Pete Forks Junction and then Road 500 eastward to the junction of Roads 500 and 557. |
| 1933 | (6.4+ Miles) | Near Weitas Meadows to Deep Saddle or beyond. The route is Road 500 eastward.   |
| 1934 | (7.5+ Miles) | Deep Saddle (or beyond) to past No-See-Um Meadows, and maybe to Indian Grave Peak. The route is Road 500 eastward.  |
| 1935 | (none)       | Road open all the way through.  |

Figure 4. shows the location of the Lolo Motorway of 1934 as it was constructed. Connecting roads for the motorway system are also shown.

## OTHER ROADS

**1931** There was new construction started on other roads in 1931 that would eventually connect them to the Lolo Motorway. One road was started south from Musselshell Meadows toward the Clearwater River. It would follow the general route of the Woodrat Trail toward Woodrat Mountain. It went south to Lolo Creek, then along the east side to the Bradford Bridge, then up Eldorado Creek and over the divide to Mud Creek where it would finally join with a road being built to Frenchman Butte [28,29]. This road was completed in August of 1932 [23]. The road to Frenchman Butte was begun in the fall of 1931 and was constructed a few miles up Suttler Creek by late fall [19].

**1932** There were four roads that were connected to the Motorway in 1932. These are now described (not necessarily in chronological order). First was the road from Musselshell R. S. to near Mud Creek Lookout as described in the previous paragraph. It was connected to the road to Frenchman Butte that was probably completed in 1933 [19]. The Frenchman Butte road started north from the Clearwater River, up Suttler Creek, past Woodrat Mountain and south past Mud Creek Lookout. It then followed the ridge to Canyon Junction, where it dipped down to the old Canyon Creek Station and then back up to the ridge and on to the lookout at Frenchman Butte. The route can now be described, going north from the Clearwater River, as Roads 418, 455, 514, 5550, and 483. The second connection was from Beaver Saddle to Hemlock Butte Lookout [13]. This road would be extended to French Mountain Lookout and then on to Pierce [13]. This route is now Roads 104, 547, and 538. (There was also a road built north from Hemlock Butte Lookout to Pine Creek [20]). The third connection was the road north from Lean-to Ridge Junction to Weitas Creek R. S. (now Weitas Guard Station). This route is now Road 555. The last connection was the spur road from the Motorway south to Snowy Summit Lookout (Road 104A).

**1933** A fifth connection to the Motorway was the road between Canyon Junction and Pete Forks Junction completed in the fall of 1933 [19]. It is now the 500 road between these points.

## PRINCIPAL ROADS OF THE MOTORWAY SYSTEM 1930-34

1. **Lolo Motorway**, Musselshell Meadows to Powell, 1930-34.
2. Musselshell R. S. to Lolo Creek to Eldorado Creek to Mud Creek Lookout, 1931-32.
3. Lean-to Ridge Junction to Weitas Guard Station, 1931-32.
4. Clearwater River to Woodrat Mountain Lookout, 1931-33.
5. Woodrat Lookout to Canyon Junction to Frenchman Butte, 1932-33.

6. Beaver Saddle to Hemlock Butte Lookout, 1932.
7. Hemlock Butte Lookout to French Mountain to Pierce, 1932.
8. Canyon Junction to Pete Forks Junction, 1933.

## ORDER OF CONSTRUCTION

The following is a list of the approximate dates of construction of various segments of the Motorway road system.

<b>August 1930</b>	Lolo Motorway to Siberia Creek.
<b>Late Fall 1930</b>	Lolo Motorway to Camp Martin.
<b>Summer 1931</b>	Musselshell R. S. to near Bradford.
<b>Fall 1931</b>	Lolo Motorway to Lean-to Ridge Junction.
<b>August 1932</b>	Musselshell R. S. to Mud Creek completed.
<b>Fall 1932</b>	Spur road to Snowy Summit Lookout.
<b>Fall 1932</b>	Lean-to Ridge Junction to Weitas Creek R.S.
<b>Fall 1932</b>	Beaver Saddle to Hemlock Butte Lookout.
<b>October 1932</b>	Lolo Motorway to near Weitas Meadows.
<b>September 1933</b>	Lolo Motorway to Deep Saddle or beyond.
<b>Fall 1933</b>	Canyon Junction to Pete Forks Junction.
<b>Fall 1933</b>	Woodrat Mountain to Canyon Creek Station to Frenchman Butte.
<b>Fall 1934</b>	Lolo Motorway to past No-See-Um Meadows.
<b>June 1935</b>	Lolo Motorway, Public Travel Permitted.

## MOTORWAY CONDITION - 1990

A remarkable amount of the original Lolo Motorway still survives in nearly its original condition. Some abandoned segments are in their original condition. The condition of each segment is summarized below. Distances along the original Motorway, to the nearest tenth mile, are denoted as **LM**.

**LM 0.0 (Musselshell Meadows) to LM 2.2.** The first part of road 5155 is near original condition. There is some reroute of the roadway and there is severe erosion at the beginning.

**LM 2.2 to LM 4.5.** This segment is permanently modified, restoration would be difficult. Road 5155 has been used for log haul and logging has occurred adjacent to the road from Trail #40 to the junction of Roads 5155 and 535.

**LM 4.5 to LM 7.5.** This segment is permanently modified; restoration would be difficult. Road 535 has been used for log haul. Some small segments are near original condition. West of the junction of Roads 535 and 5212 is a small segment of abandoned Motorway that is in its original condition.

**LM 7.5 to LM 11.7 (Beaver Saddle).** From the junction of Roads 535 and 5212 through Belle Creek Campground and up to Beaver Saddle, the Motorway is near original condition. Some sections still have open top culverts. This segment is a good representation of the original Motorway.

**LM 11.7 (Beaver Saddle) to LM 19.7 (Pete Forks Junction).** This segment is in near original condition. No log hauling has occurred except for a short segment just west of Beaver Dam Saddle where the Motorway has been widened and graveled for log haul.

**LM 19.7 (Pete Forks Junction) to LM 50.7 (12 Mile Saddle).** This segment is in its original condition except for changes made for routine maintenance and water diversion. The roadway is in remarkable shape considering the hunting season traffic when the roadbed is soft.

**LM 50.7 (12 Mile Saddle) to LM 54.2 (Saddle Camp).** This segment is essentially in its original condition except for one reroute and changes made for routine maintenance and water diversion. The reroute occurred 0.8 miles east of 12 Mile Saddle. The original Motorway segment went into the meadow above the current road, crossed the small creek, and then joined the present road. At saddle camp, the road has been slightly modified by the crossing of Road 107.

**LM 54.2 (Saddle Camp) to LM 63.2 (Indian Post Office).** The Motorway is in its original condition. On the east end of Indian Post Office, the road has been rerouted from higher on the ridge to its present location.

**LM 63.2 (Indian Post Office) to LM 64.6 (Squaw/Doe Creek Road #566).** Original condition except at the junction with Road 566.

**LM 64.6 (Squaw/Doe Creek Road #566) to LM 71.9 (Cayuse Junction).** The Motorway is in its original condition.

**LM 71.9 (Cayuse Junction) to LM 75.2.** The Motorway has been rerouted in this segment of 3.3 miles. The older segments go to the south of the peak east of Cayuse Junction and above the current Road 500 east of the saddle at LM 73.0. The easternmost segment is an excellently preserved example of the original Motorway and deserves to be preserved and interpreted.

**LM 75.2 to LM 83.6 (Papoose Saddle).** The Motorway is in its original condition.

**LM 83.6 (Papoose Saddle) to LM 90.5 (U.S. Highway 12).** This segment is permanently modified, restoration would be difficult. Road 500 from Papoose Saddle to its junction with Road 569 has been used for log haul and several log roads come into it. The Motorway segment replaced by Road 569 is altered beyond restoration.

**Summary.** Of the 90.5 miles of original Lolo Motorway, only 12.4 miles have been permanently altered by logging activity. This leaves 78.1 miles or 86-percent of the Motorway still pretty much in its original condition.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author gratefully acknowledges the research of Linnea Keating of the Clearwater National Forest for helping proof this report and providing a copy of her research notes from which much of the detailed construction notes and references were derived [31].

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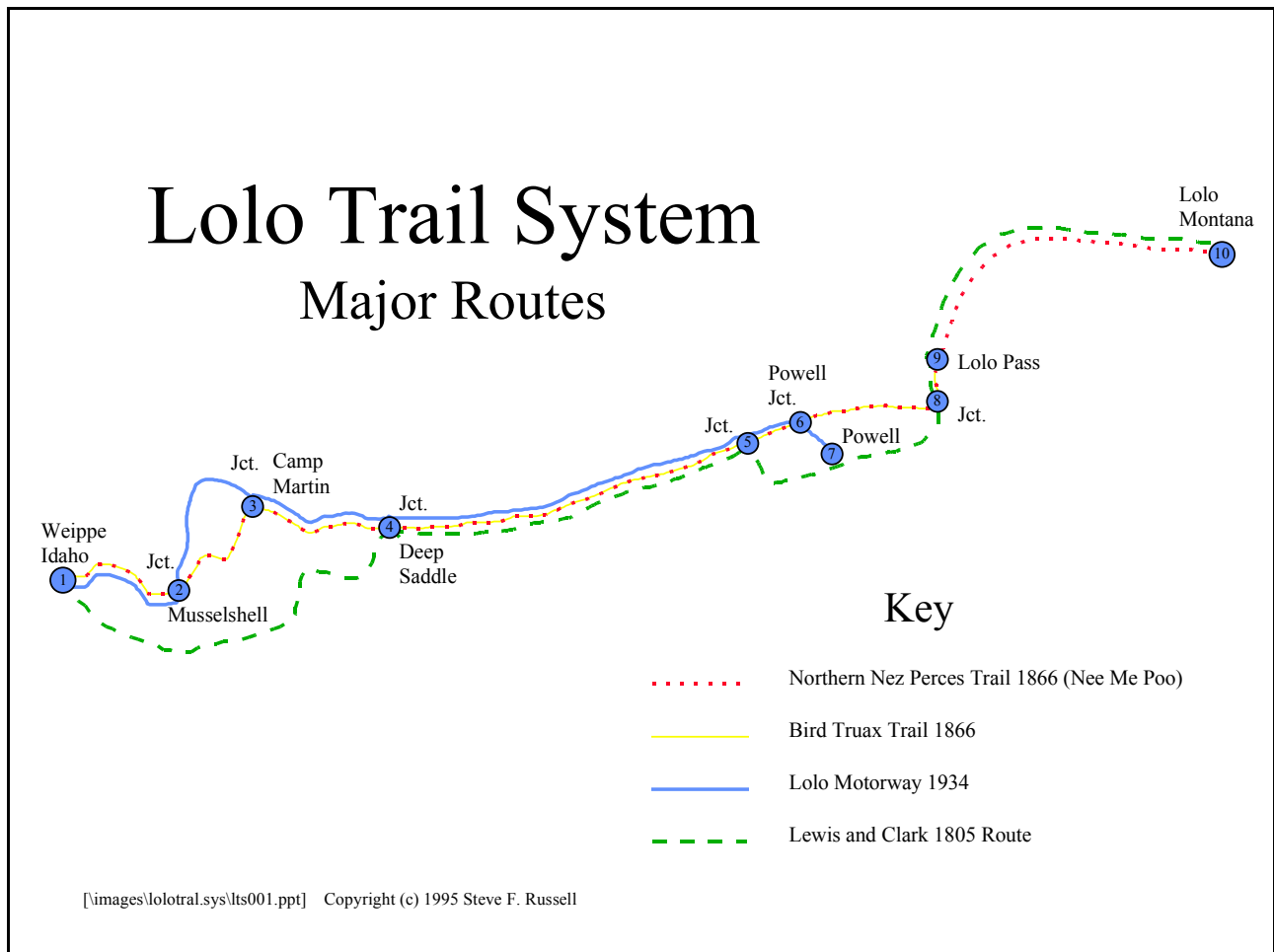
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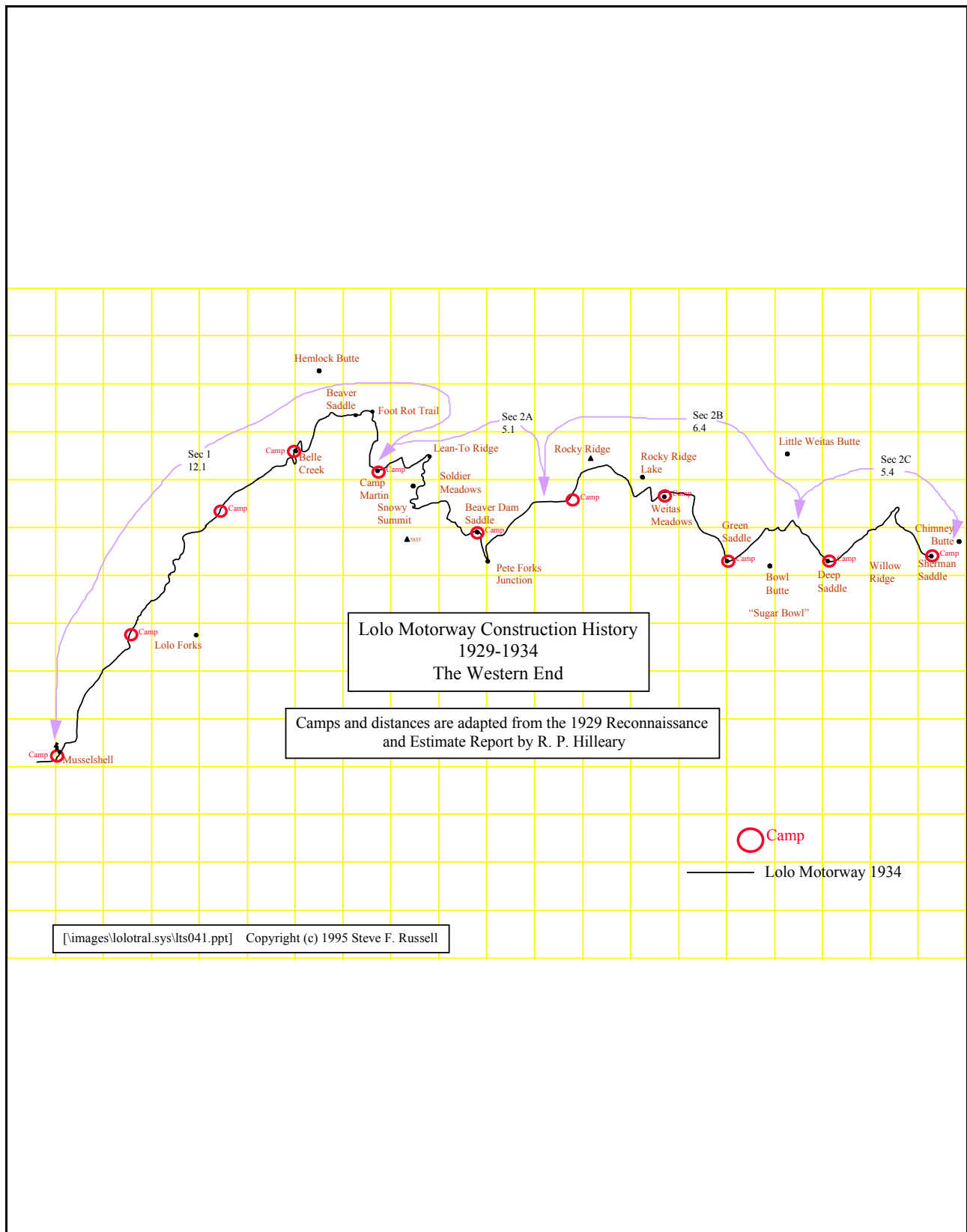
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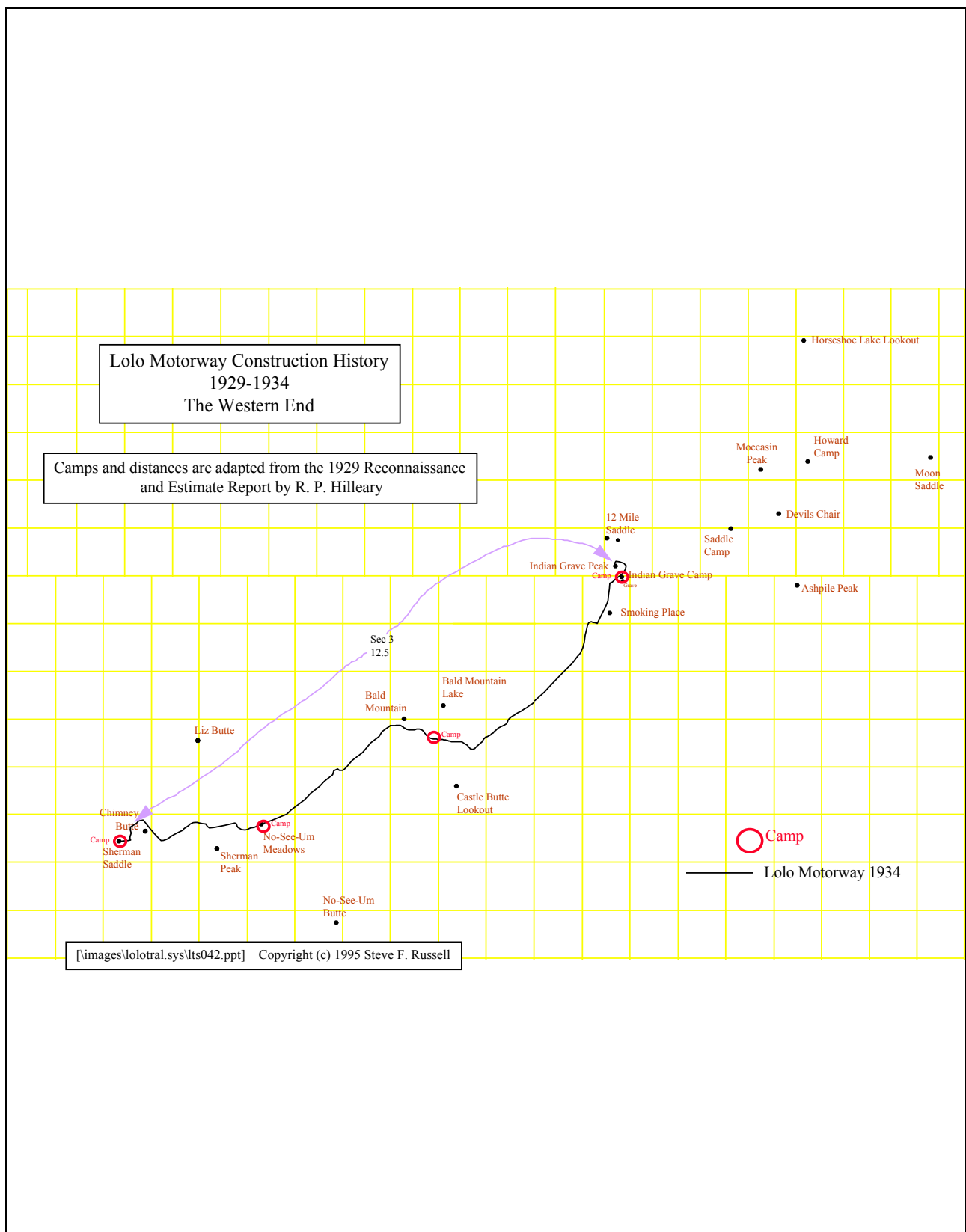
## FIGURES



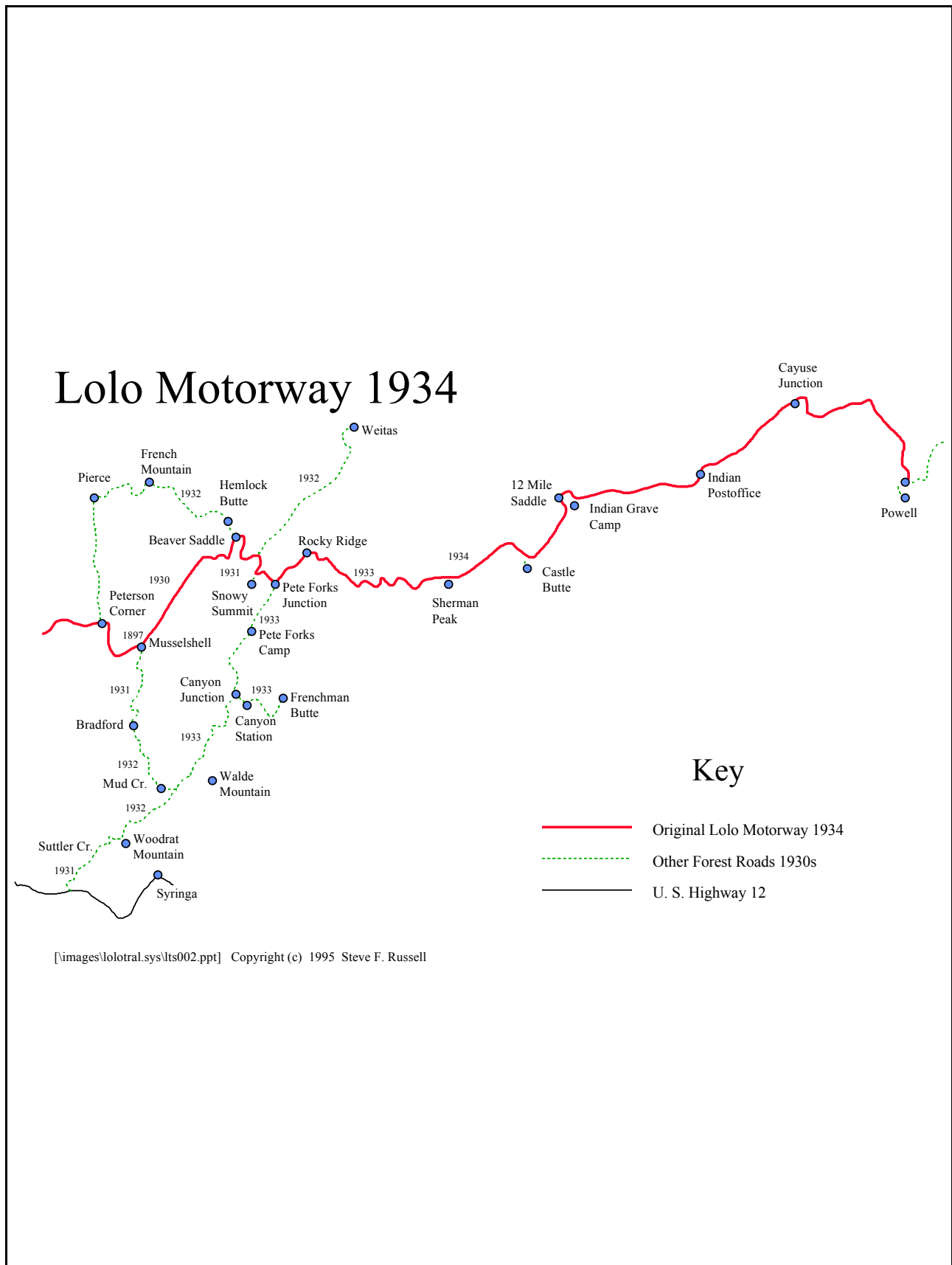
**Figure 1.** Major routes of the Lolo Trail System.



**Figure 2.** Lolo Motorway of 1934 - Western End, Musselshell to Sherman Saddle.



**Figure 3.** Lolo Motorway of 1934 - Western End, Sherman Saddle to Indian Grave Peak.



**Figure 4.** The original Lolo Motorway of 1934 and connecting roads.

